

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 LONDON 04547 01 OF 02 211723Z
ACTION EUR-08

INFO OCT-01 SS-14 ISO-00 INR-05 CIAE-00 NSAE-00 NSCE-00
SP-02 L-01 SSO-00 INRE-00 PA-01 USIE-00 /032 W
-----073174 211732Z /50
O 211658Z MAR 78
FM AMEMBASSY LONDON
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4397

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 LONDON 04547

LIMDIS

E.O. 11652: XGDS-1
TAGS: PGOV, PINT, UK
SUBJECT: CALLAGHAN ON HIS ELECTION STRATEGY

REF: LONDON 4423

SUMMARY: PRIME MINISTER CALLAGHAN RECENTLY TOLD GOVERNMENT WHIPS THAT HE EXPECTS TO CALL A GENERAL ELECTION IN OCTOBER, BUT THAT HE WOULD PREFER TO GO ON UNTIL THE SPRING OF 1979 BEFORE GOING TO THE POLLS. ACCORDINGLY, CALLAGHAN WILL SEEK TO RENEW THE CURRENT AGREEMENT WITH THE LIBERAL PARTY, BUT RECOGNIZES THAT THE PROSPECTS FOR ITS EXTENSION ARE NOT VERY GOOD. CALLAGHAN ALSO PLANS TO USE BROADCASTS OF COMMONS PROCEEDINGS TO INCREASE HIS CURRENT ADVANTAGE OVER MRS. THATCHER. CALLAGHAN'S ANALYSIS OF THE CURRENT POLITICAL SITUATION AND OUTLOOK SUPPORTS OUR EARLIER ASSESSMENT THAT A FALL 1978 ELECTION IS LIKELY. END SUMMARY.

1. PRIME MINISTER CALLAGHAN HELD A SPECIAL MEETING WITH ALL OF THE GOVERNMENT WHIPS LAST WEEK TO OUTLINE HIS CURRENT THINKING ON ELECTION TIMING, HIS STRATEGY AND HIS TENTATIVE PLANS. A GOVERNMENT WHIP WHO WAS CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 LONDON 04547 01 OF 02 211723Z

PRESENT AT THE MEETING REPORTED THAT CALLAGHAN MADE THE FOLLOWING POINTS:
-- HE (CALLAGHAN) WILL NOT CALL A GENERAL ELECTION UNTIL FORCED BY CIRCUMSTANCES TO DO SO. HE PREFERS TO AVOID ELECTION AS LONG AS POSSIBLE, BUT WILL NOT ALLOW THE OPPOSITION TO DICTATE ITS TIMING.
-- HIS CURRENT ASSESSMENT IS THAT EVENTS WILL PROBABLY

FORCE HIM TO CALL AN ELECTION THIS FALL.

-- AS A RESULT, HE WANTS TO CONCLUDE ALL PENDING PARLIAMENTARY BUSINESS BEFORE PARLIAMENT RISES FOR ITS SUMMER HOLIDAY. THE PRINCIPAL OBSTACLES TO A TIMELY ADJOURNMENT, AS CALLAGHAN SEES THE SITUATION, ARE DELAYS IN THE PROGRESS OF THE DEVOLUTION (SCOTLAND AND WALES) AND EC DIRECT ELECTIONS BILLS IN THE HOUSE OF LORDS. THESE BILLS -- AND PARTICULARLY THE SCOTLAND BILL -- MUST BE READY FOR ROYAL ASSENT BEFORE PARLIAMENT GOES ON ITS HOLIDAY, AND HE WILL KEEP BOTH HOUSES SITTING AS LONG AS NEEDED TO ACCOMPLISH THIS. A SPILL-OVER SESSION IN OCTOBER, ACCORDINGLY, IS NOT IN THE CARDS.

-- HE REALIZES THAT LIBERAL LEADER STEEL WILL HAVE TO END HIS PARTY'S CURRENT ARRANGEMENT WITH THE GOVERNMENT BEFORE PARLIAMENT RISES, BUT IS HOPEFUL THAT HE AND STEEL CAN WORK OUT AN ARRANGEMENT FOR THE NEXT SESSION OF PARLIAMENT. TO THIS END CALLAGHAN PLANS TO APPROACH STEEL, PROBABLY IN LATE JUNE, TO INVITE HIM TO MAKE SUGGESTIONS FOR POLICIES TO BE INCLUDED IN THE QUEEN'S SPEECH. CALLAGHAN BELIEVES THE LIBERALS' BEST CHANCE LIES IN TRYING TO PERSUADE THE VOTERS THAT THEY HAVE RECEIVED A SOLID QUID PRO QUO FOR THEIR SUPPORT FOR THE GOVERNMENT, AND WILL STRESS THIS ARGUMENT IN HIS DEALINGS WITH STEEL. CALLAGHAN BELIEVES STEEL CONTINUES TO ACCEPT THIS THESIS AND

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 LONDON 04547 01 OF 02 211723Z

IS VERY AWARE THAT THE LIBERALS STAND TO SUFFER HEAVY LOSSES IF AN ELECTION IS HELD ANY TIME SOON. THUS HE THINKS THERE IS A POSSIBILITY -- ALBEIT A SMALL ONE -- THAT HE CAN PERSUADE STEEL TO RENEW HIS PARTY'S SUPPORT FOR THE GOVERNMENT IN THE NEXT SESSION. -- FAILURE TO REACH AN AGREEMENT WITH THE LIBERALS WILL MEAN A FALL ELECTION IS UNAVOIDABLE, AS CALLAGHAN IS UNWILLING TO ENTER A NEW SESSION WITHOUT ASSURANCES THAT HE WOULD HAVE A WORKING MAJORITY. TO DO OTHERWISE WOULD OPEN THE POSSIBILITY OF THE GOVERNMENT LOSING THE VOTE ON THE QUEEN'S SPEECH, WHICH WOULD FORCE HIM INTO A GENERAL ELECTION IN LATE NOVEMBER OR EARLY DECEMBER, AND SURRENDER THE INITIATIVE TO THE CONSERVATIVES.

2. ACCORDING TO OUR SOURCE. CALLAGHAN WAS REASONABLY CONFIDENT LABOR CAN WIN THE NEXT ELECTION, BUT EXPECTS IT TO BE CLOSE. CALLAGHAN, HE REPORTED, ALSO BELIEVES HIS HIGH PERSONAL STANDING WITH THE ELECTORATE, AS REFLECTED IN OPINION POLLS, GIVES LABOR AN IMPORTANT ADVANTAGE, AND ONE HE INTENDS TO EXPLOIT. TO THIS END,

CONFIDENTIAL

NNN

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 LONDON 04547 02 OF 02 211721Z
ACTION EUR-08

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SS-14 INR-05 CIAE-00 NSAE-00 NSCE-00
SP-02 L-01 SSO-00 INRE-00 PA-01 USIE-00 /032 W
-----073168 211731Z /50

O 211658Z MAR 78
FM AMEMBASSY LONDON
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4398

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 02 OF 02 LONDON 04547

LIMDIS

CALLAGHAN PLANS TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE LIVE BROADCAST OF COMMONS PROCEEDINGS WHICH WILL BEGIN WHEN PARLIAMENT RETURNS FROM THE EASTER RECESS. HE PLANS TO MAKE A GREATER NUMBER OF ANNOUNCEMENTS IN COMMONS AND WILL BE CHANGING HIS STYLE IN RESPONDING TO PARLIAMENTARY QUESTIONS. CALLAGHAN WILL TRY TO MAKE HIS RESPONSES SHORTER AND MORE DIRECTLY TO THE POINT, AND WILL PROBABLY MAKE GREATER USE OF "PLANTED" QUESTIONS FROM LABOR BACKBENCHERS. HE IS CONFIDENT THAT HIS PARLIAMENTARY SKILLS WILL ALLOW HIM TO BEST MRS. THATCHER IN MOST DEBATES. HOWEVER, CALLAGHAN INDICATED THAT HE IS PREPARED TO REASSESS THIS TACTIC IF IT DOES NOT SEEM TO BE PAYING OFF.

3. COMMENT: CALLAGHAN'S ASSESSMENT OF THE ELECTORAL OUTLOOK, AS DESCRIBED BY OUR SOURCE, COINCIDES WITH OUR OWN (REFTEL AND PREVIOUS). HIS REPORTED INTENT TO SEEK RENEWAL OF THE LIBERAL PACT AND HIS JUDGMENT THAT SUCCESS IN THIS ENDEAVOR IS UNLIKELY, BUT NOT IMPOSSIBLE, IS ALSO CONSISTENT WITH OURS. AT THIS POINT WE ARE INCLINED TO AGREE THAT LIVE BROADCAST OF COMMONS PROCEEDINGS OFFERS HIM AN OPPORTUNITY TO IMPROVE HIS CURRENT LEAD OVER MRS. THATCHER, AND THAT THIS POPULAR PERCEPTION REPRESENTS AN IMPORTANT
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 LONDON 04547 02 OF 02 211721Z

POTENTIAL ASSET.

BREWSTER

CONFIDENTIAL

NNN

Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: Z
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: POLITICAL STABILITY, ELECTION CANDIDATES, ELECTION CAMPAIGNS, POLITICAL PARTIES
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 21 mar 1978
Decaption Date: 20 Mar 2014
Decaption Note: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978LONDON04547
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: X1
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780124-0711
Format: TEL
From: LONDON
Handling Restrictions:
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t19780343/aaaabkfn.tel
Line Count: 174
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 16d160c3-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION EUR
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: LIMDIS
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 4
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: LIMDIS
Reference: 78 LONDON 4423
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 22 jun 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 3257645
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: CALLAGHAN ON HIS ELECTION STRATEGY
TAGS: PGOV, PINT, UK, (CALLAGHAN, JAMES)
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odhc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/16d160c3-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014